

Strength and wisdom

An adage says 'behind every great man is a great woman,' but it seems archaic to bring up these days with the budding ascension of so many women as national leaders.

My two politically-active and college-aged daughters have watched Democratic vice presidential nominee Sen. Kamala Harris of California become a viable national force in real time. They didn't much care for Hillary Clinton, the 2016 nominee, but Harris — they like.

Although the 2020 presidential election results are not known at this writing, Harris may completely dispense with the "glass ceiling" that others tried to fracture before her. Geraldine Ferraro in 1984 (as Walter Mondale's running mate), Sarah Palin in 2008 (as John McCain's) and Clinton in 2016 (as the nominee) were all part of major party presidential tickets, but Harris could become the first woman candidate to do so and win.

My two daughters — one a future teacher, the other a future nurse — also grew up admiring the strength and wisdom of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

The "Notorious RBG" was a sentry of intellect and action who refused to be bound by gender roles, ascending to the top of a legal profession where women simply weren't allowed until relatively recently.

My daughters have grown tired of my semi-cogent recollections of how much friendlier the political theater used to be. Exhibit A was the deep and abiding friendship between RBG and Justice Antonin Scalia — two polar opposites. Their example should be the way forward for respectful disagreement and discourse.

Influencers here at home

There is little doubt that our industry is shaped by strong leaders who bring real-life experience to the table. In our 80-plus-year history as an association, we have had seven female presidents. I have had the pleasure to get to know four of them.

Julia Hausch, co-owner of Roseway Nursery in Beaverton, became OAN's first woman president in 1948. She was

inducted into the OAN Hall of Fame in 1993 and was a true pioneer.

The OAN would wait another 31 years before the next woman served as our president in 1979, when our Oregon nursery industry was starting to fill its destiny. That year, Irene Burden of Hazel Dell Gardens took the helm.

The next woman to serve, Mount Hood Chapter icon Teri Dillard Lund of William Dillard Nursery Co., shaped the industry during a critical time of its national development. To this day she influences the association through her strong faith and community focus.

I still had the new car smell as an OAN employee when Rod Park, Park's Nursery, introduced me to Teri. Her strength and character rang through.

I only was able to meet Kathie Femrite of Femrite Nursery Company, who served as OAN president in 1992, a few times. Her stature was clear and the respect she earned from members made an impression upon me.

21st century trailblazers

Recency has a bias, and clearly, I have a significant bias for the next three women who served as OAN president: Kathy LeCompte of Brooks Tree Farm served in 2001, Kristin VanHoose of Amethyst Hill Nursery/Hydrangeas Plus® served in 2011, and Leigh Geschwill of F & B Farms and Nursery served in 2016.

All three were strong, visionary and singularly talented leaders, and each has grown close to my family and children.

Nobody tells Kathy LeCompte what to do. I was driving home from accepting the director of government relations post at the OAN when the phone rang and it was Kathy. At the time, she was chairing our Government Relations Committee, so she gave me a list of things to get ready. I told her that I would not start until the following week. She thanked me and told me that she would call me the next day to check on my progress!

When Kathy ran for the state Legislature, both of my daughters had \$20 to



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

their name and attended one of Kathy's fundraisers. I found out later that they brought their money and gave it to Kathy because she was our friend. That speaks volumes.

Kristin VanHoose hired me as your executive director, but our bond was formed well before that time. Super Bowl Sunday was a must-attend event at the VanHoose home. Several nursery families (including the Brentanos and the Klupengers) were regulars and my children were enthralled with an event that had two requirements. Everyone had to have fun, and every dish had to have bacon in it. Baconfest is awesome.

I have city girls and they got head-to-toe muddy in the fields behind the nursery. My youngest failed to pack "back-up clothes" and Kristin helped and gave her pants and shirts to wear home. The shirt? Kristin's own Washington State University Cougars. Where did Carolyn wind up going to college? WSU.

Leigh Geschwill (2016) has had a Mount Rushmore type of influence on the association. Smart, savvy and a leading voice of the industry, Leigh has led through tumultuous times, both economically and politically.

She is a go-to voice for the industry, and if anyone said a bad word about her, my family would go to war with them.

The association has been blessed with strong leaders. My two independent, sassy and wickedly smart daughters have a plethora of fine examples to model themselves after. Thanks to all who help shape our industry. ©